

# The Gradual Path That Leads to Overcome Ignorance (Avijja Sutta)

(Anguttara Nikaya, Dasaka Nipatha)

As much as we read or listen to Buddha's message, our wisdom gradually increases. Simultaneously, our delusion or ignorance about beings and the world falls down. With this understanding of the Buddha's teaching, if we practice it in our day to day life, we are going forward on the path of purification and getting rid of suffering reaching the liberation. The ultimate result of all kinds of practicing in Buddhism is we are reaching real happiness that nobody can disturb. If we can face any kind of positive or negative sensual experience without fear, suffering, jealousy, attachment or anger, that is the real progress of our life. Our real success depends on how far external objects can't disturb our inner peace. Even though there are many doctrines that the Buddha has pointed out us to practice, finally we have to practice only two, those are mindfulness and wisdom. Here the Buddha kindly encourages us to develop tranquility (*Samatha*) and insight (*Vipassana*) meditation. As the result of practicing this path, our mind is rich in merits and understanding of the world reality. This, spiritually, strong mind can face any kind of challenge in life without fear and sorrow.

There are three kinds of main defilements (negative thoughts), those are desire, anger and ignorance. These are the routes of all negative thoughts. According to Buddhism, among these three defilements ignorance is the greatest taint that causes suffering (unsatisfactoriness), and it is so difficult to overcome and its results are more dangerous (***Dandha viraga mahasavajja***). Desire is also difficult to overcome, but results are less dangerous than anger and delusion (***Dandha viraga alpasavajja***). The results of anger are more dangerous than desire, but easier to overcome than desire and delusion (***Mahasavajja Khippa viraga***). By listening to the Buddha's message, reflecting on that message and concentrating on tranquility and insight meditation again and again, we can get rid of above defilements gradually according to our effort, dedication, honesty and knowledge. If we can reduce defilements in our mind, it causes us to overcome suffering and live with real happiness. Buddhism always emphasizes the importance of understanding ignorance because ignorance is the main defilement. Also as much as ignorance falls down, other defilements also gradually fall down. For that, Buddhism illuminates the nature of ignorance (or delusion) and how to overcome it.

The first step of ignorance is unknowing of Karmic Law. Somebody thinks that we have no result of our actions. Whether we like or not if we do something consciously, we will have the same results. If we do something with wicked mind, we will have the bad results in this life or next lives because of polluted mind. If we do something with pure mind, we will have fruitful results because of pure mind. If someone can understand this nature of karmic

law, he or she can get rid of first level of ignorance. This understanding results to cultivate good, not to do evil. With this knowledge and practice we can overcome a lot of difficulties and increase good.

The second step of ignorance is the unknowing of the arising of suffering. The experiences that we get through our senses arise and cease immediately. Because of ignorance we think that experience remains after we experienced it. That is why we suffer or get attached with our experience. When we think something about our past experience, we go to the past situation, and we enjoy or worry with those thoughts because of ignorance. We don't know that the experience has already ceased when we enjoy or worry about it. If we know that what we saw, heard, smelt, tasted, touched and thought, ceased after experience, we may remember it, but we don't worry because of right understanding and mindfulness. As soon as we remember that experience, we know that now 'I only read my own mind'. If we always are with this understanding, we can overcome defilements which create suffering.

Here The Supreme Buddha explains an order how we overcome suffering. When we are going to practice this path, if we know this order, it is very easy to follow the path and get the results clearly. From the beginning to the end, there are 10 steps that we have to fulfil on the path of liberation.

### **1. Associating noble friends who explain Buddha's message (*Sappurisa samseva*)**

The supreme Buddha says the first need that we should have is associating a noble friend who explains the Buddha's message with impermanence very clearly. Although we have good friends, sometimes we are not intelligent to recognize their characters. Therefore to understand a good friend we must also have good qualities, and be sensitive with noble qualities.

### **2. Listening to Buddha's message, the Dhamma (*Saddhammasavana*)**

The main benefit of having a good friend is listening to the Buddha's message. According to Buddhism, having a good friend is one of the results of great merits that we did in previous lives. If we have a good friend, listening to the Buddha's message from him is beneficial. By listening to the Buddha's message, our knowledge and understanding about our mind and body gradually grow. As the result of understanding what the Buddha taught, our wisdom increases. Wisdom (*Panna*) can be divided into two, the knowledge of Karmic law and the knowledge of impermanence. This knowledge guides us to get rid of suffering and achieve the final bliss of liberation.

With the knowledge of impermanence, we understand the world reality what happens to our life. If we have any experience through our senses, five aggregates arise together. Five aggregates are forms (*Rupa-රූප*), feelings (*Vedana-වේදනා*), perception (*Sanna-සඤ්ඤා*), mental formations (*Sankhara-සංඛාර*) and mind (*Vinnana-විඤ්ඤාණ*). These five aggregates arise together at the moment when the conditions are together, and they cease when the conditions separate instantly. These five things appear behind any kind of experiences in our life, but they are invisible, and have to be known with insight. The nature of these five aggregates is arising and ceasing. At the moment of ceasing everything ceases without leaving anything remaining. The most valuable and interesting explanation in Buddhism is impermanence. It is said in Buddhism; **Not being occurred (in the past) comes to an occurrence. Being occurred (at the present) would not come to (the future) occurrence** (අනුත්ථා සම්භූතං නුත්ථා න භවිස්සති). This is the nature of impermanence that Buddhism illustrates. Nowhere can we see this teaching except in Buddhism.

According to the conventional truth, we meet a world before we were born and after we die. Nevertheless according to the ultimate truth the world arise when our senses arise, as soon as senses cease the world also ceases. All sciences, philosophies, religions describe their teachings depending on only conventional truth. Only Buddhism describes its teaching being in ultimate truth. That is why Buddhist way is only the way to cease from suffering. Buddhism is the real path to the solution for the issue of suffering. Therefore again and again we should listen to this message and should clear our knowledge about the dependent origination that describes the impermanence.

The *Dhamma*, what the Buddha taught, has six qualities. They are well expounded (*Svakkhato*), directly visible (*Sanditthiko*), immediately effective (*Akaliko*), calling one to come and see (Ehipassiko), leading onwards (*Opanaiko*), and to be personally realized by the wise (*paccattam veditabbo vinnuhi*).

### 3. Confidence in Buddha's enlightenment (*Saddha*)

If we have a chance to ask the Buddha's message from a noble friend, the confidence in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha increases according to our knowledge. As a result of listening to this message we may know the suffering and the path that leads to get rid of suffering. Then the conviction arises in the Buddha's enlightenment. And we respect to the triple gems which are the Buddha, His teachings and His noble disciples. With this understanding these three kinds of gems become major objects in our spiritual world. We always think about these triple gems. We associate with these three things. Then our mind is full with merits and pure thoughts. As much as we listen to the Buddha's message, we go forward on confidence in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the

Sangha. Saddha or confidence is mentioned in Buddhism like a seed to grow a plant. When there is a seed, a plant grows, likewise when we have confidence (saddha) in the triple gems, all kinds of spiritual qualities grow in our life.

Saddha is the seed (*saddha beejam*), the initiator, and thus the source at the beginning.

Saddha is the hand that takes up all the advantageous of mental states.

Saddha is the wealth (*saddha dhanam*) above all, since it brings real and lasting happiness.

Saddha is the jump (*saddhaya tarati ogham*), since it enables beings to cross the flood of pain.

Saddha is the purifier, since it cleans pollutions of the mind.

#### **4. Wise investigation (*Yonisa manasikara*)**

The way how we think not to arise defilements is wise investigation (or wise reflection). There are many strategies that Buddhism has recommended to reflect on how defilements don't arise. Among them the best way is that reflecting on impermanence about our mind and body according to the Buddhism. Here we investigate our life as it is. Our mind and body always arise and cease with the conditions. When conditions are together, the experience arises. Also when the conditions separate the experience ceases nothing remaining.

#### **5. Mindfulness and clear comprehension. (*Sati sampajanna*)**

By now the person who listened to the Buddha's message has come along the path of getting rid of suffering. Little by little he practice Buddha's message in his life. He further practices awareness in mind and body. And he develops his mindfulness and attention seeing what happens to his mind and body.

#### **6. Discipline in senses (*Indriya samvara*)**

With this knowledge and understanding, the Buddha's disciple is ready to control his six senses through which he gets experience. When external stimulations come, he puts guards in his senses such as eye, ear, nose etc. His discipline in senses gradually grows up.

#### **7. Three Disciplines in mental, verbal and behavioral (*Thrividha sucarita*) activities**

Now he is going further forward on the path of purification. When he has right understanding, he is ready to get rid of suffering. That is why he tries to develop his discipline

in behavior, speech and mind. As much as he has knowledge, he controls his life and cultivates good. He does only good deeds behaviorally, verbally and mentally.

### **8. Fourfold Mindfulness (*Satipatthana*)**

By this step the disciple has gone forward more. Now he is ready to develop mindfulness fully in his mind and body. By the time he practices mindfulness as four contemplations.

- i. Contemplation of body (*Kayanupassana*)
- ii. Contemplation of feelings (*Vedananupassana*)
- iii. Contemplation of mind (*Cittanupassana*)
- iv. Contemplation of mental formations (*Dhammanupassana*)

### **9. Seven enlightenment factors (*Satta bojjhanga*)**

As the result of fourfold mindfulness, the seven factors of enlightenment increase to a higher level. These are major factors in spiritual life, like feet in our body. They are;

- i. Mindfulness (*Sati*)
- ii. Keen investigation (*Dhammavicaya*)
- iii. Effort = energy (*Viriya*)
- iv. Rapture = happiness (*Peeti*)
- v. Tranquility = calmness (*Passaddhi*)
- vi. Concentration (*Samadhi*)
- vii. Equanimity (*Upekkha*)

### **10. Gaining the full knowledge and liberation from all kind of sufferings. (*Vijjavimutta*)**

This is the final result of practicing the Buddha's message. By now we have a good knowledge about our body and mind. And we are in the highest state in all kinds of qualities, discipline, wisdom and liberation.

In this level we have overcome ignorance and delusion entirely. We completely live in the present moment. Here we know that the world arises at the moment with the conditions. Nothing comes to the present from the past, and nothing goes to the future from the present. At the moment, the experience arises and ceases with the conditions. We don't have any attachment or anger with anything because of our complete understanding. We are

fully enlightened. This is the path of liberation. This is the path of purification. This is the path of enlightenment. This is the path what the Supreme Buddha explained in his entire life to the world kindly.

These ten steps of spiritual path are described in various ways and various steps in Buddhism according to situations and persons' differences. One time the Buddha has grouped those ten steps into four steps.

They are;

1. Association with a good friend who explains the Buddha's real message
2. Listening to and reading the Buddha's Message
3. Wise Reflection
4. Practice it as tranquility and insight meditation

However, as intelligent people, we may try to go forward on spiritual path day by day searching the real happiness. As the result of practicing above four things, other five Spiritual Faculties increase in our life. They are named the five Spiritual Faculties (*five indriyas*). They are faith (*saddha*), energy (*viriya*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samadhi*), wisdom (*panna*). Meanwhile the Buddha has explained us that, we have to practice only two doctrines, they are mindfulness and wisdom. Ultimately, we have to practice only one that is wisdom. When wisdom is developed correctly as the Buddha said, all other qualities gradually increase.

The highest contemplation about all our experiences that the Buddha has pointed out to Bahiya;

“In that case, Bāhiya, you should train yourself hence: In what is seen there must be only what is seen, in what is heard there must be only what is heard, in what is sensed there must be only what is sensed, in what is cognized there must be only what is cognized. This is the way, Bāhiya, you should train yourself.

*Tasmātiha te, bāhiya, evaṃ sikkhitabbaṃ: ‘diṭṭhe diṭṭhamattaṃ bhavissati, sute sutamattaṃ bhavissati, mute mutamattaṃ bhavissati, viññāte viññātamattaṃ bhavissati’ti. Evañhi te, bāhiya, sikkhitabbaṃ. (Bahiya Sutta, Udanapali)*

**May The Triple Gem Bless You!**

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